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RADIO FREE EUROPE

Radio Free Europe Not Promoting Democracy, Fulton Lewis Jr. Feels

This is the first of three articles on the controversy between radio commentator Fulton Lewis Jr. and the Crusade for Freedom, Inc., on the effectiveness of Radio Free Europe.

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(Standard-Times Washington Bureau)

WASHINGTON, April 9 — Are the American people getting their money's worth from Radio Free Europe, the semi-official propaganda instrument aimed at the enslaved Iron Curtain countries? Is RFE beaming a message of American-style freedom and hope to these people or is it a distorted pitch for national Communism or Socialism?

Questions have been asked since the Communist radio broadcasts of Fulton Lewis Jr. in the last six months, based on a long and research job in which he has operated virtually alone. Lewis answers to these questions have aroused thousands of Americans to question the political philosophy of RFE and to doubt its effectiveness.

The Lewis broadcasts and writings have annoyed, if not frustrated the Board of Directors of the Crusade for Freedom, men of prominence in American business, who have been raising funds for the European radio operation for eight years, at the request of two Presidents and with the blessings of the State Department and other Government agencies which claim no direct role in the enterprise.

Disturbed by Policy

Commentator Lewis, contrary to some impressions, actually has no complaint with the idea of the RFE operation; in fact, Lewis permitted a sign-off plug for the Crusade for Freedom and RFE on news broadcasts for a number of years. He endorsed the propaganda campaign for what he thought it to be. What disturbs him is his belief that the "truth dollars" contributed with patriotic sincerity by many Americans are not being used by the RFE to promote Western freedom or democracy at all. While Americans are being told their money is going to help fight Communism, Lewis is convinced that RFE's policy is not anti-Communist.

Once radioman Lewis began to dig into his subject, he reached these amazing conclusions: That Radio Free Europe has at times urged the people of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria to turn from their present Soviet-dominated Communism to a brand of national Communism, rather than from Communism to democracy; that some former RFE personnel are died-in-the-wool Communists who, having worked for the broadcasting network, have suddenly defected to their native countries to undermine it; that the operation is overstaffed; that



FULTON LEWIS JR.

the Crusade for Freedom won't make a public accounting of its budget or financing, part of which is supported by the taxpayers; and that big-name sponsors of the organization have very little first-hand knowledge of the operation.

Stunned by Criticisms

RFE and the parent Crusade for Freedom have been stunned by the criticisms. The commentator's broadcasts and printed words have brought him stacks of letters from stockholders in American companies which have been contributing from \$1,000 to \$50,000 a year to finance RFE programs through the parent organization. The corporations have likewise been bombarded by disturbed shareholders and, at Lewis' suggestion, many hundreds of listeners have urged the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee to conduct an investigation.

Arthur W. Page, president of Crusade for Freedom, Inc., says neither the Crusade nor Radio Free Europe intends to be drawn into a public debate with Mr. Lewis, but because the Lewis charges have been so persistent and persuasive with so many persons, the Crusade has periodically issued denials and statements in defense of RFE, both

directly and in the name of some of the nation's top corporate executives who are members of the Board of Directors.

The Crusade has published explanations, but not denials, of some Lewis charges. For instance, the assertion that RFE won't make a public accounting of its finances. The Crusade has said it issues no financial statement because it knows such data "would be of great value to the Communists." Board members have cited the "delicate nature of the activity of Radio Free Europe" in refusing to publish the budget. The Crusade, incidentally, is operating free of Federal income tax as a "charitable" organization.

Nine in Black Market

The broadcaster hit home with another charge that nine members of RFE's Munich staff were involved in a cigaret black market. RFE said it was regrettable that the nine were "guilty of illegalities in connection with Customs payments due on cigarets in Germany." It explained that all nine were relieved of their duties abroad when the case was settled with German authorities. Three of those involved, however, are still with RFE, having been re-assigned on their return to this country.

On numerous occasions, Lewis has said there is no reason to believe RFE broadcasts are being heard to any appreciable extent behind the Iron Curtain. RFE replies that its broadcasts must be effective or the Russians wouldn't be spending millions of dollars a year to jam them. Although Lewis says there is no proof of this statement, RFE quotes an item from the Polish press alleging that Poland was able to save about \$20,000,000 a year when it stopped jamming Western broadcasts.

RFE officials claim to have counted more than 5,000 attacks against the broadcasts in 3½ years from Communist press and radio sources within the five satellite countries, plus Communist efforts through diplomatic channels and the United Nations to force Radio Free Europe to close up shop. Crusade Board Chairman Gwilyn Price says it doesn't seem to him the Communists would continue this campaign if RFE was in any way serving their interests.

Other Charges

As to some other charges: Lewis has documents which he says show that at least 10 RFE staff members turned coat to the Communist Governments. This seems to be at least partly correct. RFE says of six defectors named by Lewis, three at no time worked

for the network. Of the other three, one was said to be a typist "with no access to confidential information"; one, a 15-year-old actor on children's programs and one, a man who got a small fee for a manuscript.

At no time has Lewis advocated that Radio Free Europe "close up." What he wants is a "clean up." He has no quarrel with the stated objectives of RFE. He concedes that the policy is anti-Russian, but he says: "It is not anti-Communist. It is straight Socialist propaganda" and this, he argues, "is not what is being represented" to the American public.

On the other hand, RFE says its mission has been the same from the beginning: To contribute to the eventual achievement of full, enduring freedom and independence for the Soviet enslaved peoples of Eastern and Central Europe.

Nevertheless, Lewis has "named names" of persons who, he says, are spouting Socialism or national Communism. He has singled out RFE's Czechoslovakian desk, the head of which is Ferdinand Peroutka. Lewis states that Peroutka was a collaborator with the Russian Communists until they froze him out in 1948, whereupon

he was picked up by Radio Free Europe. To this, RFE replies that Peroutka is a Catholic and political independent who was never a Communist or pro-Communist. RFE claims no exile from behind the Iron Curtain is attacked more violently by the Communists than Peroutka. His broadcasts, according to RFE, have never advocated a Titoist or national Communist policy.

Another Target

Another target of Lewis has been Milos Vanek who, the commentator says was one of the original signers of the Second Comintern Manifesto of 1921. Vanek is identified as chief of the economic section of the Czech broadcast desk of RFE. Vanek was a Communist, RFE admits, and also a signer of the Manifesto. However, RFE says he left the Communist Party in the mid-20s and has been anti-Communist for more than 30 years.

To the general charge about the loyalties of certain RFE employees, The Crusade for Freedom says it has qualified security officers who have previously served with the FBI and military intelligence and who carefully screen and investigate every worker.

RFE says its analysis of the charges made by Lewis, particularly against certain Czechs, indicates the information may have been supplied to him by political opponents of these individuals within the Czechoslovakian emigration. RFE has told questioners that the individuals criticized by Lewis and "his informants" have been thoroughly checked.

The Senate Internal Security Subcommittee is acknowledging letters from persons who want a Senate investigation, but is making no promises.

A leading anti-Communist, William F. Buckley Jr. has talked with Lewis about his RFE charges and has openly proposed a way of evaluating the operation and the criticisms. He, like Lewis, thinks there's a place for the kind of operation that RFE purports to be and believes the fight against Communism would be better served if the whole controversy could be aired by an independent commission composed of recognized students of Communism.

The commentator, however, fears such a commission could not do an adequate job because it would lack the subpoena powers of a congressional committee and could not get access to important facts. Besides, Lewis maintains RFE is a semi-official agency of the Government, and ought to be studied by a Government body.

(Tomorrow: Is RFE propaganda in line with U. S. foreign policy?)